



REL Appalachia Ask-A-REL Response

July 2017

Question:

When adopting new educational initiatives, reforms, and policies in schools and districts, what factors facilitate or hinder sustainable change, particularly at the elementary school level?

Response:

Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about factors that facilitate or hinder change in schools and districts. Ask-A-REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the 10 Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. Ask-A-REL provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations in response to questions about available education research.

Following an established REL Appalachia research protocol, we searched for research reports and descriptive study articles on barriers to and facilitators of sustainable change in education. The sources included ERIC and other federally funded databases and organizations, research institutions, academic research databases, and general Internet search engines. For more details, please see the methods section at the end of this document.

The research team did not evaluate the quality of the resources provided in this response; we offer them only for your reference. Also, the search included the most commonly used research databases and search engines to produce the references presented here, but the references are not necessarily comprehensive, and other relevant references and resources may exist.

References

Adelman, H. S., & Taylor, L. (2007). Systemic change for school improvement. *Journal of*

Educational and Psychological Consultation, 17(1), 55–77. Abstract retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ772288>; full text available at <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/publications/systemic%20change%20for%20school%20improvement.pdf>

From the abstract: “Despite the nationwide emphasis on school improvement, the complexities of accomplishing desired systemic changes have been given short shrift in policy, research, training, and practice. This article focuses on the problem of expanding

school improvement planning to better address how schools and districts intend to accomplish designated changes. Specifically, we frame and outline some basic considerations related to systemic change, and, to encourage a greater policy discussion of the complexities of implementing major school improvements on a large scale, we propose a set of policy actions.”

Boyd, S. (2016). Staying on the journey: Maintaining a change momentum with PB4L “School-Wide”. *Teachers and Curriculum*, 16(2), 27–36. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1123366>

From the abstract: “How do schools maintain momentum with change and enter new cycles of growth when they are attempting to do things differently? This article draws on a two-year evaluation of the “Positive Behaviour for Learning School-Wide” initiative to identify key factors that enabled schools to engage in a long-term and iterative change process. Fullan’s systems-thinking ideas about school leadership and change, along with literature on the sustainability of educational initiatives, are used to analyze the interrelated factors that assisted schools to successfully embed this new initiative and address challenges. The design features of “School-Wide,” the way in which support for schools was organized, and practices within schools that created a continuous improvement culture, all contributed to schools being able to maintain a change momentum and continue to grow “School-Wide” in the longer-term.”

Coburn, C. E. (2003). Rethinking scale: Moving beyond numbers to deep and lasting change. *Educational Researcher*, 32(6), 3–12. Retrieved from <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/publications/139042460457c9a8422623f.pdf>

From the abstract: “The issue of “scale” is a key challenge for school reform, yet it remains undertheorized in the literature. Definitions of scale have traditionally restricted its scope, focusing on the expanding number of schools reached by a reform. Such definitions mask the complex challenges of reaching out broadly while simultaneously cultivating the depth of change necessary to support and sustain consequential change. This article draws on a review of theoretical and empirical literature on scale, relevant research on reform implementation, and original research to synthesize and articulate a more multi-dimensional conceptualization. I develop a conception of scale that has four interrelated dimensions: depth, sustainability, spread, and shift in reform ownership. I then suggest implications of this conceptualization for reform strategy and research design.”

Coburn, C. E. (2005). Shaping teacher sensemaking: School leaders and the enactment of reading policy. *Educational Policy*, 19(3), 476–509. Abstract retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ689350>; full text available at <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/publications/212861411257c9a7ce1bd88.pdf>

From the abstract: “A growing body of research has emphasized the social processes by which teachers adapt and transform policy as they enact it in their classrooms. Yet little attention has been paid to the role of school leaders in this process. Drawing on sociological theories of sensemaking, this article investigates how principals in two California

elementary schools influenced teacher learning about and enactment of changing reading policy. It argues that principals influence teachers' enactment by shaping access to policy ideas, participating in the social process of interpretation and adaptation, and creating substantively different conditions for teacher learning in schools. These actions, in turn, are influenced by principals' understandings about reading instruction and teacher learning."

Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K. A., Horner, R., & Sugai, G. (2009). *Readiness for change. Scaling Up Brief #3*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG, SISEP. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED507442>

From the abstract: "The purpose of this "Brief" is to define the variables a state or large district leadership team may wish to consider as they determine if they are "ready" to invest in the scaling-up of an innovation in education. As defined here, "scaling up" means that at least 60% of the students who could benefit from an innovation have access to that innovation in schools across a State. Creating benefits to students on a comprehensive scale requires considerable change by teachers, building staff, district staff, and state leaders. "Readiness" is defined as a developmental point at which a person, organization, or system has the capacity and willingness to engage in a particular activity. Creating readiness for change is a critical component of both initiating and scaling up the use of evidence-based practices and other innovations in education. The authors frame the core elements of readiness, and place the role of "readiness for change" in the larger context of implementation stages."

Klute, M., Cherascaro, T., & Apthorp, H. (2016). *Summary of research on the association between state interventions in chronically low-performing schools and student achievement* (REL 2016–138). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Central. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED565613>

From the abstract: "This report summarizes the research on the association between state interventions in chronically low-performing schools and student achievement. Most of the research focused on one type of state intervention: working with a turnaround partner. Few studies were identified that examined other types of interventions, such as school closure, charter conversion, and school redesign. Most studies were descriptive, which limits the conclusions that can be drawn about the effectiveness of the interventions. Results of studies of turnaround partner interventions were mixed and suggested that student achievement was more likely to improve when particular factors—such as strong leadership, use of data to guide instruction, and a positive school culture characterized by trust and increased expectations for students—were in place in schools."

Meyer-Looze, C. L. (2015). Creating a cycle of continuous improvement through Instructional Rounds. *NCPEA International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 10(21), 29–45. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1060972>

From the abstract: "Instructional Rounds is a continuous improvement strategy that focuses on the technical core of educational systems as well as educators collaborating side-by-side.

Concentrating on collective learning, this process only makes sense within an overall strategy of improvement. This case study examined the Instructional Rounds process in a northern Michigan school district. Pressure points identified included a culture of distrust, an unclear definition of learner outcomes and effective teaching, and a status quo view of improvement. Supportive strategies for change were identified and continue to be implemented as part of the district's continuous improvement strategy."

Parise, L. M., & Spillane, J. P. (2010). Teacher learning and instructional change: How formal and on-the-job learning opportunities predict change in elementary school teachers' practice. *The Elementary School Journal*, 110(3), 323–346. Abstract retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ890679>; full text available at <https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/publications/6741999824c3f5b6e37fde.pdf>

From the abstract: "Recent education reform has emphasized the importance of teacher learning in improving classroom instruction and raising student achievement. This article focuses on teachers' learning opportunities, including formal professional development and on-the-job learning that occurs through interactions with colleagues. Using data from 30 elementary schools in a mid-sized urban school district, the authors concurrently explore the relationships between teachers' formal professional development and on-the-job learning opportunities and instructional change. Results suggest that formal professional development and on-the-job opportunities to learn are both significantly associated with changes in teachers' instructional practice in mathematics and English language arts."

Proger, A. R., Bhatt, M. P., Cirks, V., & Gurke, D. (2017). *Establishing and sustaining networked improvement communities: Lessons from Michigan and Minnesota* (REL 2017–264). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED573419>

From the summary: "A networked improvement community is a collaborative research partnership that uses the principles of improvement science within a group of organizations to learn from promising practices developed in each context and how they may be adapted to other contexts. Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest worked with educators in Michigan and Minnesota to establish two networked improvement communities during the 2015/16 school year. The collaborations revealed that the following tasks are important in establishing successful networked improvement communities:

- Building a cohesive team with participants representing different types of expertise.
- Reducing uncertainty by clarifying what participation entails.
- Building engagement by aligning work with ongoing efforts.
- Using tools and resources from improvement science to identify a problem that is important and specific enough to be able to act on.
- Embedding capacity building to develop additional expertise for using continuous improvement research to address problems of practice."

Rieckhoff, B. S., & Larsen, C. (2012). The impact of a professional development network on leadership development and school improvement goals. *School-University Partnerships*, 5(1), 57–73. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ974369>

From the abstract: “Principals are expected to create a vision for their schools with clearly articulated goals for sustainable change. The 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards provide a strong framework for leadership knowledge, behavior and dispositions. ISLLC Standards 1 and 2 outline the school leader’s responsibility in articulating the school vision and providing a successful instructional program. Professional Development Schools (PDSs) provide a model of school reform that enables school leaders to access multiple avenues of support in their efforts to develop and implement this vision. This article considers the impact a professional development school partnership has on leadership development. The authors document the principals’ perspective on the impact of the PDS partnership and how the partnership allows school leaders to focus on clear school improvement goals and targeted professional development as their leadership and school-wide sustainable changes develop over time.”

Stewart, C., Raskin C., Zielaski, D. (2012). Barriers to district-level educational reform: A statewide study of Minnesota school superintendents. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 7(3). Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ997452>

From the abstract: “This study attempts to identify and describe Minnesota superintendents’ perceptions of barriers to district-level reform as well as compare superintendents’ perceptions of district reform related characteristics. This research also strives to identify factors preventing Minnesota’s district-level leadership from implementing national reform efforts. All acting superintendents in the state of Minnesota were surveyed using a quantitative descriptive approach. The study revealed two major findings: Superintendents who claimed their districts had leadership skills to enact school change and knowledge of successful strategies regarding school reform were unrelated to the identification of barriers to district-level reform; and superintendents who claimed that their districts had passive resistance to change and ingrained patterns of behavior to resist change were related to the identification of barriers to district-level reform.”

Additional Organizations to Consult

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: <https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/>

From the website: “The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is committed to developing networks of ideas, individuals, and institutions to advance teaching and learning. We join together scholars, practitioners, and designers in new ways to solve problems of educational practice. Toward this end, we work to integrate the discipline of improvement science into education with the goal of building the field’s capacity to improve.”

Center for Mental Health in Schools & Student/Learning Supports: <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/>

From the website: “Stated simply, our mission is to improve outcomes for students by helping districts and their schools enhance how they address barriers to learning and teaching and re-engage disconnected students. One way we do this is by providing information and links for leaders and practitioners to access a range of no-cost resources developed by us and others that can be used for school improvement, professional development, and direct student/learning support.

We also are playing a role in transforming student and learning support by helping districts move away from what typically is a fragmented, piecemeal approach to providing student and learning supports. Our emphasis is on unifying student/learning supports and redeploying what already is budgeted for such activity to develop a comprehensive and equitable system for addressing barriers to learning and teaching. To this end, we provide free technical assistance and coaching for systemic change to SEAs and LEAs.”

The National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools:

<https://my.vanderbilt.edu/scalingupcenter/>

From the website: “What are the components of effective high schools? What types of programs, practices, and processes support these components? How can districts scale up these components to less effective high schools? These are the questions around which the National Center on Scaling Up Effective Schools (NCSU) is working. Funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, NCSU focuses on identifying the combination of essential components and the programs, practices, processes and policies that make some high schools in large urban districts particularly effective with low income students, minority students, and English language learners. We will then develop processes to share these practices with less effective schools.”

National Implementation Research Network: <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu/>

From the website: “The mission of the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) is to contribute to the best practices and science of implementation, organization change, and system reinvention to improve outcomes across the spectrum of human services.

Our Goals:

- To advance the science of implementation across human service domains (e.g., health, education, social services).
- To inform policies that promote implementation science and best practices in human services.
- To ensure that the voices and experiences of diverse communities and consumers influence and guide implementation efforts.”

Additional Ask-A-REL Responses to Consult

Ask-A-REL Central at Marzano Research. *What does the research say about the most effective way to implement statewide change?* Retrieved from <https://www.relcentral.org/what-does-the-research-say-about-the-most-effective-way-to-implement-statewide-change/>

Ask-A-REL Northeast & Islands at EDC. (2012). *What does the research say about collaboration and its essential role in school reform or systems change?* Retrieved from http://www.relnei.org/wp-content/referencedocs/RELNEI_RD0013_School_Reform.pdf

Ask-A-REL Southeast at Florida State University, Florida Center for Reading Research. (2015). *What are the evidence-based practices for forming and convening a panel of experts to implement an education policy change?* Retrieved from http://rel-se.fcrr.org/_ask-a-rels/3-15/Ask%20A%20REL%20Use%20of%20Expert%20Panel%20to%20implement%20education%20policy%20change.pdf

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- “Improvement science” OR “implementation science” OR “continuous improvement” OR “networked improvement”
- (School OR education) AND (change OR reform) AND (systemic OR sustain* OR long-term)
- (Change OR reform) AND (challeng* OR barrier* OR facilitat* OR drive*)

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the academic database ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the commercial search engine Google.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

In reviewing resources, Reference Desk researchers consider—among other things—these four factors:

- Date of the publication: Searches cover the most current information (i.e., within the last ten years), except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- Search priorities of reference sources: Search priorities include IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols. Applicable resources must be publicly available online and in English.
- Methodology: The following methodological priorities/considerations guide the review and selection of the references: (a) study types—randomized controlled trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc., generally in this order; (b) target population, samples (representativeness of the target population, sample size, volunteered or randomly selected), study duration, etc.; (c) limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.

- Existing knowledge base: Vetted resources (e.g., peer-reviewed research journals) are the primary focus, but the research base is occasionally slim or nonexistent. In those cases, the best resources available may include, for example, reports, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites.

Resources included in this document were last accessed on June 23, 2017. URLs, descriptions, and content included here were current at that time.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Appalachia region (Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory Appalachia (REL AP) at SRI International. This Ask-A-REL response was developed by REL AP under Contract ED-IES-17-C-0004 from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, administered by SRI International. The content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.